

## DISCOURSE ISSUES AND STRATEGIES IN LUTHER'S "A MIGHTY FORTRESS" AND MONSELL'S "FIGHT THE GOOD FIGHT."

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### Abstract

*This study investigates discourse issues and strategies in Martin Luther's "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God" and John Monsell's "Fight the Good Fight", examining how language constructs ideological meaning within Christian hymnody. Although hymns are central to religious and cultural practice, scholarly attention within discourse studies has largely overlooked them, particularly from a linguistic perspective that foregrounds ideology and strategy. This study addresses this gap by treating the hymns as purposeful discourses that encode belief through patterned language use. Adopting a qualitative Critical Discourse Analysis informed by van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach, the study explores how shared belief systems are reproduced through lexical choice, metaphor, pronoun usage, and evaluative structures. The analysis reveals two dominant discourse issues: Christian warfare and spiritual pilgrimage. In Luther's hymn, Christian warfare is linguistically realized through militaristic lexical items such as "fortress," "bulwark," "foe," "arms," and "fight," which frame faith as collective resistance against evil. Monsell's hymn, by contrast, foregrounds pilgrimage and moral endurance through journey-oriented lexis such as "fight," "race," "run," "crown," and "life," constructing faith as an individual ethical journey. These discourse issues are sustained through discursive strategies including assertion (e.g., declaratives such as "A mighty fortress is our God"), invigoration (imperatives such as "Fight," "Run," "Lift up"), polarization (believers versus sin or evil), and positive self-presentation (lexicalization of believers as strong, faithful, and victorious). The study concludes that these hymns function as ideologically loaded linguistic texts and demonstrates the relevance*

*of Critical Discourse Analysis to literary and religious discourse within English studies.*

**Keywords:** Critical Discourse Analysis; Discourse issues, Discourse strategies, Hymnody, Language.

### Introduction

Language plays a central role in the construction and circulation of meaning in religious practice, functioning not only as a medium of devotion but also as a powerful instrument for shaping belief, identity, and moral orientation. Within Christian tradition, hymns constitute a distinctive form of discourse in which theology and ideology are linguistically encoded and repeatedly reinforced through ritual performance. Because hymns are designed for memorization and collective participation, their lexical choices, metaphors, and grammatical patterns possess strong cognitive and persuasive force (van Dijk, 2015). However, despite their prominence in worship and cultural history, hymns have received comparatively limited attention within linguistic and discourse-analytic scholarship.

Most existing studies on Christian hymnody have focused on theological interpretation, historical context, or musical composition, often treating hymn texts as transparent expressions of belief rather than as strategically organized discourses (Watson, 2019). As a result, the discourse issues and strategies through which hymns construct ideology and guide moral cognition remain underexplored. Recent discourse-oriented studies in religious contexts have demonstrated that language plays a decisive role in shaping collective identity and value systems, particularly through metaphor, evaluative language, and pronoun use (Oduola, 2024; Subhan & Subhan, 2025). However, such approaches are rarely extended to hymn texts, creating a clear research gap.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) offers a productive framework for addressing this gap, as it conceptualizes language as a form of social practice through which ideology is enacted and reproduced. Van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach is especially relevant because it links textual structures to shared mental models and belief systems, enabling the analysis of how discourse shapes perception and group alignment (van Dijk, 2013). This perspective is particularly suitable for hymnody, where repetition and communal performance facilitate the internalization of ideological meanings.

This study applies van Dijk's CDA to Martin Luther's "*A Mighty Fortress Is Our God*" and John Monsell's "*Fight the Good Fight*" to examine how discourse issues such as Christian warfare and spiritual pilgrimage are linguistically constructed. It further explores how discursive strategies, including assertion, invigoration, polarization, and positive self-presentation, operate through lexical items, metaphors, and syntactic choices. By foregrounding hymns as ideologically structured linguistic texts, the study contributes to contemporary English and discourse studies by extending CDA to an underexamined religious genre.

### Review of Existing Studies and Statement of the Problem

Religious discourse has been studied from multiple perspectives within linguistics and discourse analysis, yet the specific linguistic and strategic analysis of Christian hymnody remains underexplored. Several key studies provide useful analytical precedents, but each has limitations when considered from a discourse-analytic and ideological perspective.

Watson (2019) offers a comprehensive historical and critical overview of the English hymn tradition, tracing thematic development and textual features. A major strength of this work is its depth of historical contextualization and its attention to the interplay between theology and lyric form. However, Watson's study primarily

adopts a literary–historical lens, which limits its ability to systematically analyze discursive strategies and ideological mechanisms within hymn texts. The work does not engage with contemporary approaches in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) or socio-cognitive models that link language use with shared belief systems.

Subhan and Subhan (2025) investigate religious speech on social media using CDA to reveal how language constructs collective religious identity and ideological alignment. This study's strength lies in its application of discourse analysis to digital religious communication, demonstrating how metaphors and evaluative language shape belief online. Nevertheless, its limitation is the focus on speech events in digital contexts, which differ markedly from hymnic texts in structure, function, and communal performance. Thus, the findings cannot be directly extended to hymnody without adaptation.

Oduola and Lanre-Atoyebi (2024) analyze “discursive dynamics” in selected Eurocentric and Afrocentric hymn texts, identifying themes of identity and cultural narrative. This study's strength is its focus on textual processing and cultural discourse, but its analytical framework remains descriptive and thematic rather than tying linguistic features to ideological cognition or specific discursive strategies as conceptualized in van Dijk's CDA. It does not systematically investigate strategies such as assertion, invigoration, or polarization.

Okoye and Onyeachulam (2024) apply CDA to the Nigerian national anthem to explore language and ideology. While this work successfully demonstrates how national discourse shapes collective identity through polarization and metaphor, its focus on national political discourse restricts its theoretical transferability to religious hymnody, which invokes different cultural schemas and interpretive practices.

Muhie (2021) conducts a comparative CDA of religious texts, including scripture, to uncover ideological constructs. A primary strength of this study is its explicit use of CDA across religious genres, yet its scope is broad, spanning multiple text types without a concentrated focus on performative religious lyrics like hymns, which function differently in communal worship and cognitive internalization.

Across these studies, strengths include established use of CDA, attention to ideology, and textual analysis of religious discourse. However, limitations arise from either a lack of focus on hymn texts, reliance on descriptive rather than strategic analysis, or application to non-hymnic genres. What is noticeably missing in the literature is a socio-cognitive, strategy-oriented analysis of Christian hymnody that systematically identifies how linguistic devices (e.g., lexical choice, metaphor, pronouns) function as discursive strategies to produce and reproduce belief systems.

This study addresses that gap by applying van Dijk's socio-cognitive Critical Discourse Analysis to two prominent Protestant hymns: Martin Luther's "*A Mighty Fortress Is Our God*" and John Monsell's "*Fight the Good Fight*". By focusing explicitly on discourse issues (e.g., Christian warfare, spiritual pilgrimage) and discursive strategies (e.g., assertion, invigoration, polarization, positive self-presentation), the research provides a linguistically grounded model for understanding how hymn texts shape cognitive and ideological patterns in religious discourse, an area that existing studies have not fully explored.

### **Aim and Objectives**

The aim of this paper is to examine discourse issues and strategies in the selected hymns, showing how language constructs spiritual warfare in both texts. The specific objectives are to:

1. identify discourse issues in the selected hymns;
- 2.

analyse the discourse strategies in both hymn text;

3. reveal the relationship between these strategies and the audience's cognitive schemas.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is grounded in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which views language as a form of social practice through which ideology and belief systems are constructed and reproduced (Fairclough, 2015; Wodak & Meyer, 2016). Within CDA, van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach is adopted as the primary framework because it links textual structures to shared mental models, showing how discourse shapes cognition and group identity (van Dijk, 2015). This is particularly suitable for Christian hymns, which are memorized and performed communally, reinforcing ideological meanings over time.

Van Dijk identifies key discursive strategies such as positive self-presentation, negative other-presentation, polarization, and metaphorical framing, realized through lexical choice, pronouns, modality, and evaluative language. These strategies are essential for analyzing discourse issues like Christian warfare and spiritual pilgrimage in hymn texts. Complementary insights from Fairclough and Wodak emphasize the importance of situating texts within socio-cultural and historical contexts, while research on metaphor and stance (Charteris-Black, 2018; Hyland, 2018) highlights how lexical and figurative choices shape cognitive representations and ideological understanding.

While van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach provides the principal analytical framework for examining discourse structures, ideology, and cognition, this study also recognizes the importance of interpreting religious discourse within its sociocultural environment. In this regard, complementary insights are drawn from African sociological thought, particularly the communitarian orientation that

shapes African religious and social realities.

African sociological perspectives emphasize that discourse is not merely an individual linguistic performance but a socially shared activity deeply rooted in communal identity, spirituality, morality, and collective consciousness. The African worldview, often captured through the philosophy of Ubuntu, foregrounds interconnectedness, social responsibility, and communal solidarity. Such perspectives are particularly relevant to Christian hymns and faith-based discourse because they function not only as spiritual expressions but also as instruments of social cohesion, moral instruction, resistance, and identity formation within faith communities.

This perspective strengthens the analysis of *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God* and *Fight the Good Fight of Faith* by situating their discourse strategies within broader communal and socioreligious contexts. The songs do not merely communicate personal faith; they construct collective spiritual consciousness, reinforce communal resilience, and negotiate ideological positions concerning struggle, protection, perseverance, and divine authority.

Furthermore, African sociological thought aligns with van Dijk's emphasis on the relationship between discourse, cognition, and society by highlighting how shared beliefs, cultural memory, and collective experiences shape interpretation and meaning. The integration of this perspective therefore enhances the contextual relevance of the study within contemporary African academic discourse.

This study further draws on recent socio-cognitive discourse studies to explain how audiences process and internalize ideological meanings embedded in religious hymns. Within van Dijk's socio-cognitive framework, discourse comprehension is mediated through mental models and context models that shape how recipients interpret texts based on shared social knowledge, beliefs, and prior experiences (van Dijk, 2021, 2024). Consequently, audience

interpretation is not determined solely by textual structures but also by cognitive schemas activated during discourse processing.

In religious discourse, recurring expressions such as spiritual warfare, divine refuge, perseverance, and victory function as cognitively familiar constructs capable of evoking shared Christian mental representations among listeners. Thus, the discourse structures in *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God* and *Fight the Good Fight of Faith* potentially reinforce collective faith consciousness, emotional identification, and ideological alignment within Christian communities. This socio-cognitive orientation therefore strengthens the study's movement beyond text-based interpretation toward a more evidence-based understanding of audience effect and discourse reception.

### Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative approach using van Dijk's socio-cognitive Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to examine language, ideology, and cognitive effects in hymn texts (Creswell & Poth, 2018; van Dijk, 2015). The data comprise the original lyrics of two Protestant hymns: Martin Luther's "*A Mighty Fortress Is Our God*" and John Monsell's "*Fight the Good Fight*", sourced from verified hymnological anthologies and digital repositories to ensure textual integrity. Analysis proceeded in three stages: first, discourse issues such as Christian warfare and spiritual pilgrimage were identified as central ideological themes; second, linguistic and discursive strategies including lexical choice, metaphor, pronoun usage, modality, and evaluative language were examined to reveal strategies such as assertion, invigoration, polarization, and positive self-presentation (Charteris-Black, 2018; Hyland, 2018); and third, the relationship between these strategies and the audience's cognitive schemas was interpreted, showing how textual features reinforce shared belief systems (Fairclough, 2015; Wodak & Meyer, 2016).

This procedure ensures a systematic, linguistically grounded analysis of how the hymns construct meaning and communicate ideology through discursive strategies.

The study is text-based. Therefore, issues of informed consent and confidentiality do not apply. Ethical integrity is nonetheless maintained through accurate representation of the hymn text within their historical and theological contexts.

The selection of *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God* and *Fight the Good Fight of Faith* was purposive and informed by the objectives of the study. The two hymns were chosen because they represent distinct historical, theological, and sociocultural contexts within Christian discourse. While *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God* reflects the classical Protestant Reformation tradition and its discourse of divine protection, resistance, and spiritual warfare, *Fight the Good Fight of Faith* represents a more contemporary Christian expression that emphasizes perseverance, faith, and personal spiritual struggle within modern worship culture.

The selection also enables a comparative discourse analysis across different temporal and ideological settings, thereby providing insight into how Christian hymns employ language, discourse strategies, and ideological constructions to communicate faith-based messages across generations. Furthermore, the hymns were selected because of their thematic richness, widespread recognition within Christian communities, and their suitability for examining discourse issues such as identity construction, persuasion, spirituality, and collective consciousness.

The study does not aim at statistical generalization but at an in-depth qualitative exploration of discourse structures and strategies within selected Christian hymns. Therefore, purposive sampling was considered appropriate for achieving the interpretive objectives of the research.

## Data Analysis

The discourse issue of spiritual warfare is foregrounded most explicitly in Luther's hymn through the grammatical construction of evil as an animate, intentional participant in conflict.

### (1) "For still our ancient foe/ Doth seek to work us woe"

Linguistically, the noun phrase "our ancient foe" combines possessive deixis ("our") with the evaluative adjective "ancient", which temporally extends the enemy's existence and suggests durability and persistence. The head noun "foe" is inherently adversarial, encoding opposition rather than neutrality. The auxiliary construction "doth seek" foregrounds intentionality and volition, while the infinitive clause "to work us woe" assigns the enemy the role of Actor in a material process ("work"), with "us" as the affected Goal. This transitivity structure linguistically enacts spiritual warfare as deliberate aggression.

### (2) "And, armed with cruel hate/ On earth is not his equal"

The past participle "armed" functions adjectivally, metaphorically transferring the semantic field of physical combat to the spiritual domain. The prepositional phrase "with cruel hate" specifies the weaponry, where "hate" is intensified by the attitudinal adjective "cruel", encoding strong negative evaluation. The clause "On earth is not his equal" employs a superlative construction through negation, which elevates the enemy's power to an unmatched level. This exaggeration heightens the perceived threat and legitimises divine dependence.

In Monsell's hymn, spiritual warfare is discursively recontextualised as moral struggle, realised through imperative mood and second-person address.

(3) **“Fight the good fight with all thy might”**

The clause is structured as an imperative, directly positioning the addressee as Agent of action. The repetition of “fight” (verb and noun) creates lexical cohesion and reinforces the warfare metaphor. The adjective “good” introduces moral evaluation, distinguishing this struggle from worldly conflict. The prepositional phrase “with all thy might” intensifies the demand through totalising quantification (“all”), foregrounding effort and endurance rather than external opposition.

The discourse issue of Christian pilgrimage is constructed most explicitly in Monsell's hymn through motion verbs and path metaphors.

(4) **“Run the straight race through God's good grace”**

The verb “run” encodes dynamic motion and sustained effort, while “race” frames life as a bounded, goal-oriented process. The adjective “straight” functions metaphorically to signify moral correctness and discipline. The prepositional phrase “through God's good grace” introduces divine enablement, with the evaluative adjective “good” reinforcing positive appraisal of God's agency. Linguistically, human action and divine support are integrated within a single clause.

(5) **“Life with its way before us lies/ Christ is the path, and Christ the prize”**

The nominal group “Life with its way” personifies life as a journey, while the spatial deictic phrase “before us” situates believers as travellers moving forward. The parallel equative clauses “Christ is the path” and “Christ the prize” employ relational processes to assign Christ dual roles: means (“path”)

and goal (“prize”). This grammatical parallelism strengthens cohesion and reinforces theological completeness.

In Luther's hymn, pilgrimage is realised not as forward movement but as survival amid adversity.

(6) **“Our helper He amid the flood/ Of mortal ills prevailing”**

The noun “helper” assigns God a supportive participant role, while the metaphor “flood” encodes overwhelming quantity and force. The adjective “mortal” intensifies “ills” by associating suffering with human finitude and death. The present participle “prevailing” suggests ongoing success, linguistically construing endurance rather than destination.

The discourse strategy of assertion is realised through unmodalised declarative clauses that encode certainty and authority.

(7) **“A mighty fortress is our God”**

This clause uses a relational process (“is”) to equate God with “a mighty fortress.” The adjective “mighty” intensifies strength, while “fortress” draws from military architecture, encoding protection and permanence. The absence of modal verbs removes epistemic uncertainty, presenting the claim as an indisputable fact.

(8) **“His truth to triumph through us”**

The nominalised form “truth” abstracts doctrine into an active force, while “triumph” encodes victory. The prepositional phrase “through us” positions believers as conduits rather than originators of power, reinforcing divine agency.

Monsell similarly asserts doctrinal certainty through equative structures.

**(9) "Christ is thy strength and Christ thy right"**

The repetition of "Christ is" creates syntactic parallelism, reinforcing cohesion and emphasis. The possessive "thy" personalises faith, while "strength" and "right" encode empowerment and legitimacy respectively.

Polarisation structures both hymns by linguistically opposing threat and assurance.

**(10) "And though this world, with devils filled"**

The concessive conjunction "though" anticipates danger, while "devils filled" uses saturation imagery to depict pervasive evil. The world is discursively constructed as a hostile space.

**(11) "We will not fear"**

The future-tense modal "will" expresses volitional resolve rather than prediction. The collective pronoun "we" constructs shared identity in opposition to fear.

In Monsell's hymn, polarisation is internal and affective.

**(12) "Faint not nor fear, His arms are near"**

The negated imperatives "faint not" and "fear" prohibit negative emotional states, while "His arms are near" employs proximity metaphor to encode protection and intimacy.

Invigoration is achieved through directive language.

**(13) "Fight ... Run ... Lay hold"**

The asyndetic sequence of imperatives creates rhythmic urgency and motivational force, linguistically enacting sustained action.

**(14) "We will not fear"**

Here, invigoration is realised through collective commitment rather than command, reinforcing solidarity.

Finally, positive self-presentation constructs believers as valued and empowered.

**(15) "The Spirit and the gifts are ours"**

The possessive "ours" signals inclusion and ownership, while the plural "gifts" suggests abundance of divine resources.

**(16) "He changeth not, and thou art dear"**

The clause juxtaposes divine constancy with human worth. The adjective "dear" functions as affective evaluation, positioning the believer as loved and secure.

From the foregoing, the linguistic analysis demonstrates that both hymns deploy precise grammatical and lexical resources to construct spiritual warfare and pilgrimage, while simultaneously enacting assertion, polarisation, invigoration, and positive self-presentation as persuasive discourse strategies.

**Interdiscursive Recontextualisation of Sacred Texts**

The selected hymns also demonstrate significant interdiscursive relationships with biblical discourse, particularly through the recontextualisation of scriptural expressions into Christian worship and devotional language. *Fight the Good Fight of Faith* draws directly from First Epistle to Timothy 6:12, which exhorts believers to "fight the good fight of faith." In the hymn, this biblical injunction is transformed from an apostolic instruction within an early Christian context into a contemporary discourse of perseverance, spiritual resilience, and personal commitment to faith. Similarly, *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God* recontextualises biblical images of divine protection, warfare, and refuge found in several Psalms, especially Book of Psalms 46, into a reformational discourse of resistance, assurance, and theological identity.

From a Critical Discourse Analysis perspective, such interdiscursive connections reveal how sacred texts are reproduced, adapted, and ideologically reinterpreted across historical and sociocultural contexts. The hymns do not merely quote scripture; rather, they reconstruct biblical discourse in ways that address the spiritual, emotional, and communal realities of their respective audiences. This demonstrates how religious discourse continually negotiates meaning through the interaction between sacred texts, historical experiences, and contemporary faith practices.

### Conclusion

This study has shown that Martin Luther's "*A Mighty Fortress Is Our God*" and John Monsell's "*Fight the Good Fight*" employ complex linguistic and discursive strategies to communicate ideological meanings, construct spiritual and moral identity, and guide cognitive models of faith. Luther's hymn emphasizes collective resilience and confrontation with spiritual adversaries\* while Monsell's hymn emphasises individual perseverance and ethical vigilance reflecting differences in historical context and theological emphasis. In both cases, positive self-presentation, negative other-presentation, polarization, metaphorical framing, and repetition are central strategies for embedding ideology in language.

### Recommendations

Based on the findings, several implications for research, education, and practice emerge. In further research, future studies could expand the scope to include hymns from other Christian denominations or world religions, enabling comparative analyses of discursive strategies and ideological framing across cultural and theological contexts. Also, religious educators and music instructors can use CDA-informed analysis to help students understand how hymns

communicate moral and ideological messages, enhancing both critical thinking and spiritual literacy.

Furthermore, combining discourse analysis with historical and theological studies could deepen understanding of how language shapes religious practice, social identity, and collective cognition. Lastly, hymns in digital formats, such as online repositories and social media performances, can be studied using CDA to explore modern ideological reproduction and cognitive engagement in contemporary worship practices.

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